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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 30 June 2010, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Ali ..... (Malaysia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Annual ministerial review: Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women (*continued*)

National voluntary presentations: Namibia, France and the United States of America (E/2010/58, E/2010/61 and E/2010/81)

1. **The President** invited Mr. Rosenthal (Observer for Guatemala) to act as moderator for the national voluntary presentations.

Namibia (E/2010/61)

2. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia), Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, said that the presentation of Namibia's strategies for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its own development goals under Vision 2030, would focus on health, education and poverty in relation to gender.

3. **Mr. Chirawu** (Namibia), Lecturer at the University of Namibia, accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that Namibia was a country of about 2.5 million people and had a mixed economy. At least 65 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, mostly in the North, and 53 per cent of the rural population were women. Thus, population factors were key to Namibia's approach to development planning.

4. The Government had adopted a number of strategies in its efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs and the goals of Vision 2030. In the area of health and gender, priority was given to primary health care in order to achieve objectives relating to child, maternal and reproductive health and the prevention of infectious diseases; other strategies included integrated management of the State's antiretroviral treatment programme; research; preventive immunization campaigns; upgrading of infrastructure and construction of new facilities; cultivating and maintaining cordial donor-host relationships; and ongoing staff training.

5. The outcomes showed that those strategies had facilitated progress towards meeting the targets set for 2006 and 2012, including reduction of the child mortality rates and improvement of maternal health. Some of the targets relating to HIV/AIDS would be met; however, there were still problems with regard to the availability of funds and skills. The main challenge was funding for countrywide immunization; HIV/AIDS treatment; nutritional and poverty reduction, particularly among women in rural areas.

6. In the past, women had been deprived of opportunities to develop their skills and contribute to Namibia's development. A substantial budget had been allocated to ensuring universal access to education. The Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) covered education at every level, ensuring the quality of services and the necessary infrastructure. The Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) had been established to provide education for women and girls who had dropped out of school because of pregnancy or for other reasons. There was also continuous retraining and upgrading of teachers' qualifications, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels. Many teachers were taking paid leave in order to upgrade their skills and become more effective. Despite mixed results with NAMCOL, a great deal of progress had been made and some of the 2006 and 2012 targets would be achieved by 2015.

7. The Government was addressing a number of challenges, including stereotyping as in Africa, culture played a major role in a person's future. Infrastructure was being improved with cooperation from the international community and the shortage of teachers was being remedied by recruiting them from other countries in the region.

8. Poverty and gender strategies included the creation of an enabling environment to give women economic opportunities and the establishment of *koshi yomuti* ("banking under the tree"). One challenge had been the World Bank's classification of Namibia as an upper-middle-income economy, which made it more difficult for the Government to obtain loans.

9. **Ms. Koukku-Ronde** (Finland), reviewer, said that Namibia would probably achieve many of the MDGs and had done very well in providing health and social services in a sparsely populated country with many ethnic groups and languages. As the State's National Development Plan 3 relied on positive economic development projections, she hoped that the financial crisis would not affect support for gender equality programmes.

10. She welcomed the increased proportion of women in Parliament and hoped that the 50 per cent target would be met by 2012. It would, however, have been useful for the report to have covered women's political participation.

11. In the education sector, results in the areas of student performance, teachers and school facilities were not in line with the investments made. The report emphasized the importance of health, but the most recent budget allocated more resources to the Ministry of Defence than to the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Greater attention should be paid to gender-based violence and to the violation of sexual rights as a specific form of violence; the differences between formal and customary laws in that regard were a challenge.

12. Although Namibia had the world's highest level of income inequality, Namibia had been classified as an upper-middle-income economy. Income distribution correlated with ethnicity, geographical region and gender. She asked about the Government's plans to address the high level of unemployment, which affected women more severely than men. The *koshi yomuti* microfinance initiative was a good example of a grass-roots initiative designed to lift rural women out of poverty but other factors, such as the question of property rights, should also be addressed.

13. The Government should facilitate the private sector's employment and education initiatives; the gender mainstreaming policy was an important step towards gender equality. It was important for everyone — women and men, rich and poor, young and old — to be involved in efforts to achieve the MDGs.

14. **Mr. Yañez-Barnuevo** (Observer for Spain), reviewer, hailed the significant improvements in primary and adult education and vocational training in Namibia. In light of the challenges highlighted in the report, he urged the national authorities to develop indicators on strategic goals and public policies; continue to investigate the reasons why students dropped out of school; and pursue the Ministry of Education's decentralization process with a view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of available resources among the various parts of the country, including rural areas, and providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls.

15. The private health sector absorbed the bulk of specialized human resources, which inevitably had an adverse impact on the public sector. The Government would have to increase its efforts to achieve Goal 5 of the MDGs — improving maternal health — by 2015. Noting that the Government had identified priorities for speeding up the reduction of maternal and child mortality and morbidity, he urged it to establish a national HIV task force, bringing together all existing coordination mechanisms; such a body would be crucial to further developing HIV/AIDS mitigation strategies and the role of the relevant agencies in combating that pandemic.

16. Noting that it was difficult for rural communities and the most disadvantaged sectors, including women, to gain access to microcredit, he welcomed the design and establishment of strategies and mechanisms, such as *koshi yomuti*, which promoted the microcredit sector in Namibia; international providers with experience in that field could also provide assistance for or participate in such mechanisms.

17. **Ms. Dzivhani** (Observer for South Africa), reviewer, said that she welcomed Namibia's achievements in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, especially the stress placed on the equal representation of women in decision-making. She would, however, like to have additional information about the institutional arrangements designed to foster empowerment and equality and, ultimately, to reach the international development goals, including the MDGs. She would appreciate further details on Namibia's bottom-up planning approach, which clearly reflected strong partnerships among grass-roots organizations, women-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. She welcomed Namibia's emphasis on the provision of affordable and high-quality health services to all and on the development of health infrastructure, which would, inter alia, lead to better reproductive services. The rapid scale-up of the antiretroviral treatment programme would benefit women significantly as they were the most heavily affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

18. Hailing Namibia's emphasis on education, which was critical to the achievement of women's empowerment and gender equality, she congratulated the Government on achieving its targets in primary, secondary and tertiary education and increasing the enrolment of female students in previously male-dominated fields of study. She particularly welcomed the ETSIP, designed to address poor academic results

in senior secondary education, which had had a positive impact on girls' education, and wondered whether there were any cultural or traditional practices that adversely affected the educational performance of women and girls.

19. Noting the impact of poverty on social and economic growth, she welcomed the *koshi yomuti* initiative; local savings not only provided sustainability, but also encouraged ownership, responsibility and accountability. South Africa, which had a number of fragmentary funding schemes for women, could learn from that initiative.

20. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia), Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, said that the Government's commitment to improving the quality of education was reflected in its massive investment in the education sector. Early childhood was currently the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, but consideration was being given to transferring that mandate to the Ministry of Education as suggested by Finland's Minister of Education during her recent visit to Namibia.

21. Various national measures had been taken as part of the effort to achieve the MDGs: a road map was in place; a resource mobilization strategy had been set up; and, as part of an African Union initiative, Namibia had launched a campaign to accelerate the reduction of maternal mortality in Africa as a complement to national efforts.

22. The Ministry of Defence had the largest budget of all the ministries because it employed the most people. Namibia had emerged from war only 20 years previously and the Ministry of Defence had provided employment to persons returning from exile or with no formal education. Namibia had no enemies, but its armed forces assisted the United Nations with security missions when so requested.

23. The country's classification as an upper-middle-income economy prevented it from obtaining loans, yet its visible poverty, especially in rural areas, showed that it was not a rich country and that the classification was inappropriate. Land ownership was concentrated in a small number of people, most of whom lived outside the country. The Government could not confiscate the land but was trying to purchase it for redistribution.

24. She acknowledged the challenges encountered in the education sector. ETSIP had been developed in order to respond to those challenges, but donor support would be needed in order to facilitate further progress. While it was important for parents to contribute through the school development fund and school fees, their children could still attend school if they were unable to do so. NAMCOL offered courses for those who had dropped out of school or been denied an education.

25. The current arrangement for coordination of the national HIV/AIDS response was still effective. There were challenges in some areas of implementation, but the impact of the programme was being monitored in order to optimize its output.

26. With regard to development of the institutional framework for gender equality, she said that when Namibia had attained independence in 1990, the President had created a Women's Desk. As that arrangement had proved to be insufficient, the Department of Women's Affairs had been established in 1995. In 2000, it had become the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare and in 2005, the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Child Welfare; that name change reflected the need for inclusiveness in gender relations.

27. Namibia's prioritization of primary health care did not exclude prevention; on the contrary, primary health care included prevention, health promotion and curative and rehabilitation services.

28. **Mr. Chirawu** (Namibia), Lecturer at the University of Namibia, said that Namibia was a democratic country that respected the rule of law. If its people did not have property rights, the land belonging to absentee owners would have already been taken by settlers. Equal achievement in education and training was an ongoing concern and a number of policies were in place. Lastly, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and the Ministry of Health worked hand in hand, through clear policy reviews and initiatives in order to ensure that benefits accrued to women.

France (E/2010/81)

29. **Mr. Heyries** (France), Executive Director for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, reaffirmed the universal nature of human rights, including women's rights. France condemned all forms of violence against women and wished to give fresh impetus to the international agenda on women's rights and equality. Respect for women's reproductive and sexual rights

and their equal and full participation in economic, social and political life were vital to achievement of the MDGs.

30. His Government's participation in multilateral bodies showed its commitment to women's rights. Since 2006, France, together with the Netherlands, had played a leadership role in the adoption of an annual General Assembly resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Combating both de facto and de jure discrimination against women was a priority for his country.

31. The international community must remain vigilant and make more effective use of the excellent work accomplished by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The establishment by the Human Rights Council of a new mechanism on laws and practices that discriminated against women, as a complement to the existing mechanisms, would be a significant innovation.

32. The gender strategy paper adopted in December 2007 was central to French gender policy in the context of its development cooperation efforts. The two main goals of the strategy were to bring about radical and lasting changes in gender relations in order to ensure respect for the rights and fundamental freedoms of both sexes; and to undertake a more accurate analysis of gender issues and the power relations upon which they depended in order to improve development policies. France was committed to placing the reduction of gender inequalities at the centre of the political dialogue; ensuring a cross-cutting gender equality approach in all its policies; and initiating and supporting activities designed to foster equality. The 2008 Action Plan on women and equality entitled "Women as Development Stakeholders", which emphasized women's activity in the economic sector and the role of gender equality as a condition for growth and development, was consistent with that policy. It provided human and financial resources for the implementation of women's activities and cross-cutting policies focusing on gender equality, and 18 African businesswomen were currently being trained under the Plan at the National School of Administration.

33. At the regional level, France, in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), had implemented a cooperation programme entitled "Support for advancement of the rights of women and the family in the Arab world" from 2004 to 2008. The programme had provided support for a number of projects, including the establishment of a national network of crisis centres for women victims of violence in Morocco; the launching of a national strategy for combating violence against women in Algeria; and the provision of capacity-building for the National Commission for Lebanese Women. France welcomed the conclusions of the Union for the Mediterranean's Second Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Marrakesh in November 2009. In addition to reiterating their commitment to promoting de jure and de facto equality between men and women and to respecting the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, the participants had adopted a road map and initiated common projects to improve the status and living conditions of women. In that regard, France would participate fully in the work of the Foundation of Women for the Mediterranean, which it had established jointly with Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco. He hailed the adoption by the International Organization of La Francophonie of a strong political declaration on ending violence against women at the March 2010 session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

34. Despite the progress achieved, efforts must be intensified in four priority areas: improving the legal status of women throughout the world; enhancing their access to quality sexual and reproductive health care; increasing their economic independence; and ensuring their equal participation in decision-making.

35. At the national level, de jure equality in France had not yet been translated into de facto equality in all areas. For example, while girls generally performed better at school than boys, the female workforce was concentrated in a few, less-well-paid areas and women did more part-time work than men because maternity often put their careers on hold. As a result, there was a growing gender wage gap and women were poorly represented in the decision-making bodies of corporations.

36. His Government was trying to correct those structural inequalities through a comprehensive policy that emphasized equality in schools and pursued the goal of employment and wage equality through dialogue between employers and employees and implementation of the 2006 Law on Equal Wages for

Women and Men. The pension reform bill to be discussed in the second half of 2010 provided, inter alia, for fines against firms with at least 300 employees that failed to establish a diagnosis on employment and wage equality and, if adopted, would oblige firms with 300 or more employees to provide an analysis of the relative positions of men and women. Companies with best practices in gender equality were awarded the equality label. A bill currently under discussion would establish a 40 per cent quota for women on the boards of directors or supervisory boards of private, public and Government-owned corporations. France supported work-life balance through the development of childcare facilities.

37. Although legislation to prevent and combat violence against women had been in place in France for at least a decade, together with two plans of action, 156 women had been killed in 2008 by their current or former intimate partners. The Prime Minister had made combating violence against women the 2010 national priority concern; Parliament had recently enacted new legislation that established the offence of psychological or mental violence and allowed the use of restraining orders against perpetrators of domestic violence; and a variety of measures, including legislation, had been envisaged in order to combat polygamy. The impact of media stereotypes would be addressed as part of the campaign to combat violence against women. An inter-ministerial gender equality action plan was being developed in order to give fresh impetus to the dual approach recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action. The draft plan, to be adopted in the latter half of 2010, should lead to innovative strategies and would be implemented at the regional level. It would cover all key areas of gender equality, including women's access to positions of responsibility in politics and the economy; employment and wage equality; and work-life balance.

38. The MDGs — especially Goal 3 on gender equality and Goal 5 on the reduction of maternal mortality — could only be achieved if the outcome documents adopted at the Cairo and Beijing conferences and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were fully implemented and if women were given their rightful place not only as beneficiaries of development, but also as full-fledged participants in that process.

39. **Mr. Rosenthal** (Observer for Guatemala), moderator, said that although France was a highly developed country, many of the issues under discussion were equally relevant for developing countries.

40. **Ms. Skalli** (Morocco), reviewer, said that her country's many links with France had been demonstrated at the second Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society of the Union for the Mediterranean, at which a number of firm commitments had been made. France's experiences and successes could be used as a model for other countries, particularly those of the French-speaking world.

41. Morocco had a national equality strategy similar to France's new impetus for a gender-mainstreaming approach, as well as a new Government equality agenda and gender-sensitive budgeting. In that light, she asked whether France's budgeting was gender-sensitive and what tools were being used to assist with inter-departmental coordination on equality. She would appreciate further information on any difficulties that the French Government had faced in its implementation of equality measures. Women's participation in politics often met with resistance, even though it contributed greatly to their independence and to sustainable development. Quotas had been used successfully in Morocco's June 2009 local elections, resulting in an almost 3,000 per cent rise in the number of women elected. It would be interesting to hear more about France's experiences in that regard.

42. The rate of unemployment for women was high in France and the International Labour Organization (ILO) had noted the negative impact of the financial crisis on the employment of women in 2009. The crisis had also led to an increase in violence against women. She therefore asked what strategies France was implementing in order to reverse those trends and to encourage the rehiring of women since equality in the workplace was likely to boost the world economy and help end the crisis. The International Labour Organization had adopted a Global Jobs Pact and France was well known for its social policies and, in particular, for promoting a good work-life balance; she wondered what measures were being taken to reinforce those trends.

43. On the issue of violence against women, she noted France's proactive policy and asked for more information. As noted in France's national report (E/2010/81), Morocco had a network of 345 crisis centres for women victims of violence, including those

administered through official channels and by NGOs. She would welcome additional information about women's shelters in France and on efforts to hold men responsible for such violence.

44. A sensitive issue in French-speaking countries was the feminization of prestigious job titles, on which there had been encouraging moves by French-speaking delegations at the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women. As France had adopted legislation on the issue, she requested an update on its implementation and on its effectiveness in combating stereotyping.

45. Lastly, she asked whether France's progress towards the achievement of Goal 8 of the MDGS — on developing a global partnership for development — was on track.

46. **Mr. Schaper** (Observer for the Netherlands), reviewer, said that he welcomed the clear overview of policies that had been presented. Since his country and France were both members of the European Union, they often faced similar challenges and could learn from each other's experiences. The bill that aimed to establish a 40 per cent quota for women on the boards of directors of private, public and Government-owned corporations seemed to be following the example set by Norway. The Netherlands had also set up a system to encourage companies to increase the number of women in top management positions, so he would be interested to see the effects of France's legislation over the coming years.

47. France had one of the highest fertility rates in Europe and, at the same time, had been successful in combining work with family life with almost as many women as men in the workforce. He asked to what extent men made use of the gender-neutral policies on balancing work and family life. He also asked for more information on how greater access to childcare had affected the number of women in the workforce and, indirectly, economic growth.

48. He would welcome additional information on the effects of the recent legislation on violence against women. As the Act of 4 April 2006 also contained provisions relating to forced marriage, he would like to know what progress had been made in that regard and how progress was being assessed. Internationally, France and the Netherlands had cooperated closely over the years in combating violence against women and had played a leadership role in the adoption of annual General Assembly resolutions on the issue; he was therefore pleased to note that France was drafting a national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The Netherlands had recently completed a midterm review of its national action plan on that resolution and would be happy to cooperate further with France on the issues raised therein.

49. **Mr. Heyriès** (France), Executive Director, Women's Rights and Gender Equality, said that France aimed to mainstream gender equality into the work and budgets of every Ministry. The previous year, a pilot budget document had been drawn up in order to track the various measures and allocations related to women's rights and gender equality. Advantages of the mainstreaming approach included maximizing the visibility of goals and encouraging coordination. The way forward was to adapt France's policies and infrastructure; only a gender mainstreaming approach would enable the country to achieve its goals effectively.

50. With regard to the issue of gender equality in politics, he acknowledged that France had not attained particularly positive results thus far. In recent years, rules had been implemented in order to ensure parity in certain elections using the party list system, but they did not apply to, for example, the National Assembly or the Senate. One solution could be to impose financial sanctions for political parties that did not respect the parity objective.

51. As there were no quotas for the corporate hiring of women, they accounted for only 10 per cent of the board members of France's largest companies. The issue had been under discussion for some time, but many women were opposed to quotas since they could lead to negative perceptions of the women hired. However, since the issue was so significant and natural adaptation had been so slow, quotas were being viewed as a way of accelerating the process. A bill on quotas would soon be brought before the Senate and, if adopted, would enter into force in 2011.

52. The economic crisis had worsened unemployment. Poverty was high among young women, single mothers and older women, who had lower pension rates and fewer savings. Women must be guaranteed access to decision-making bodies and enabled, from an early age, to take decisions and access training that would lead to successful careers.

They should be encouraged to consider a wide range of studies and professions and given appropriate training in order to avoid "dead ends". Parliament had adopted legislation on wage quality, but it was not yet clear whether it would be necessary to fine companies that did not cooperate in reducing the gender gap in salaries and pensions. Moreover, any pension reform would take many years to produce effects. Responsibility for negotiating ways to limit the negative effects of part-time work, including enforced part-time work, had also been passed to the Government's social partners. Lastly, additional childcare modalities should be developed, although it should be noted that France had already had considerable success with its various childcare arrangements as demonstrated by the fact that it had both a high birth rate and a high level of employment among women. Additional, more innovative, childcare options — for example, non-standard hours — would be created by 2012. He had no statistical evidence that investment in such measures translated in terms of increased GDP, but they were helpful both in enabling women to work and increasing the size of the workforce in general.

53. France had a strong legislative arsenal on the issue of domestic violence. Its overall strategy was to strengthen the relevant laws, find better solutions for women victims of violence, including by setting up more shelters, and raise awareness about the issue. The 2006 Act had not, as yet, led to a reduction in violence; the first phase of its impact had, however, seen an increase in the number of complaints, prosecutions and convictions.

54. Forced marriage was covered by the 2006 Act, but no exact statistics on its incidence were available. Studies showed that a proportion of forced marriages occurred abroad, which made it more difficult to address the issue. When there was any doubt as to a bride's consent, registry officers conducted mandatory hearings with both parties separately, without witnesses present.

55. Combating gender stereotypes was important and was being addressed on two fronts: in education and in the media.

56. **Ms. Sportis** (France) said that while there had been some progress in the feminization of job titles, there was still a way to go. The media could be particularly useful in popularizing the new terminology but it was important to note, that the *Académie Française*, France's official linguistic authority, had opposed such change.

57. France was nearing the end of a comprehensive review of its global development strategy, the outcome of which would include integration of Goal 8 of the MDGs. Strategy development would remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, but programmes on the ground would be taken on by the *Agence française de développement* (French Development Agency) with the exception of pilot programmes, which would remain under the authority of the Ministry. For the first time, France had declared the amount of money allocated to women's issues in its most recent report to the Development Assistance Committee.

58. **Ms. Vianès** (Coordination Française pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes) paid tribute to Ms. Hansa Mehta, who had represented India as one of the two women involved in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ms. Mehta had influenced the decision to use the term "human rights", thereby ensuring that the fundamental rights of women were also recognized, in the Declaration.

59. On the issue of violence against women, she said it was crucial to recognize that the country's patriarchal and theocratic heritage had led to a society based on gender inequality. All types of violence needed to be addressed, including prostitution and acts of violence against women committed in the name of tradition, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called "honour" crimes. The 2006 Act had added to France's legal arsenal by criminalizing psychological abuse and forced marriage; the issue now was to raise awareness about the Act and enforce it effectively.

60. The challenges of the twenty-first century could not be met with half of humanity's creative force unused. Gender equality was not a luxury only for developed countries in times of growth; it was the key to achieving the MDGs. The French Republic must ensure the application of its founding principles for all women, in France and around the world. Secularism in particular, putting each person in charge of his or her own life, was a great tool for emancipation.

61. Noting that most migrants were women, she asked what was being done to protect them from violent traditional practices and to obtain reliable data on those practices. She wondered whether funds had

been allocated to support for NGOs working to achieve the MDGs by, inter alia, exchanging best practices with other organizations on a number of important issues.

62. **Mr. Sahasrabuddhe** (Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini) said that in the traditional society of India, gender issues had acquired an air of political correctness so that people did not dare to question the logic behind them openly. However, that fact had also masked some people's views. He asked what the Government was doing to change men's attitudes towards gender issues.

63. **Ms. Renford** (Observer for Israel) said that the economic crisis posed some risk to some countries' progressed towards gender equality. She therefore asked what measures — in addition to existing social programmes — were being taken to reduce the impact of layoffs and to help the women affected by them to find new jobs.

64. **Mr. Heyriès** (France), Executive Director, Women's Rights and Gender Equality, confirmed that most migrants were women and said that a number of reforms designed to address migrants' rights were under way. Statistics were difficult to obtain since once migrants arrived in the country, they were no longer classified as such. Measures were being developed so that migrants could be interviewed when they first arrived in order to help them access information on matters such as language classes and job interviews that would help them better integrate into society. The legislation on female genital mutilation and forced marriage had been strengthened but, as France had no legal definition of polygamy, that act was not criminalized.

65. France had two measures in place to reduce the impact of layoffs: a Government office that helped workers find new jobs and more recent social security measure, introduced in 2009, that provided a financial incentive to encourage people to return to work.

66. **Ms. Sportis** (France) said that her Government had worked with French NGOs in developing the country's priorities for the Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, to be held in September 2010.

United States of America (E/2010/58)

67. **Ms. Verveer** (United States of America), Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues, said that the United States was committed to working with others to meet the MDGs by 2015 and to ensure that development gains were sustainable. Goal 3, on gender equality, was the key to achieving all the other Goals since no country could get ahead if half of its citizens were left behind. Women and girls constituted one of the world's greatest untapped resources and investing in them would have a tremendous multiplier effect on international development. Globally, women were still vastly underrepresented; they held less than one fifth of posts in national Governments, were significantly outnumbered in parliaments and provincial councils and were often missing from negotiating tables where conflicts were to be resolved.

68. Investment in women was linked to the overall prosperity of nations and women-run small- and medium-sized enterprises were proven drivers of gross domestic product (GDP). Investing in women's health acted as a positive multiplier, benefiting social and economic development through the health of future generations, and higher rates of female participation in government had been associated with lower levels of corruption. For those reasons, the United States had put women and girls at the core of its development strategy and foreign policy. Indeed, the creation of the post that she currently held — Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues — was unprecedented for her country and signalled that none of the major current issues, including governance, security and development challenges, could be seriously addressed without the participation of women at every level. The centrality of women and girls was also evident in, and integrated throughout, United States foreign assistance programmes.

69. Describing three major initiatives that illustrated her country's commitment to achieving the MDGs, she noted that the $63 billion Global Health Initiative focused on women and girls, whose health had the greatest impact on families and communities. Her Government was strengthening health systems in order to provide women with an integrated package of essential health services and was linking health programmes to efforts to remove the economic, cultural, social and legal barriers to health care for women and girls. The Global Health Initiative also reinforced her Government's commitment to addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic which, in many parts of the world, affected mainly women. Through that Initiative and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), it hoped to provide women and girls with the appropriate tools and knowledge to

protect themselves. To that end, it was endeavouring not only to integrate HIV/AIDS treatment with programmes that addressed gender-based violence — a scourge which contributed to the spread of HIV — but also to treat HIV-positive mothers, thus reducing the likelihood of their transmitting the virus to their children.

70. Investing in women and girls was also a key pillar of the US$ 3.5 billion Feed the Future initiative, which recognized that women's contributions to agricultural production must be recognized and their need for training and access to financial services, markets and decision-making met in order to enhance agricultural productivity and end hunger. Reform of land tenure rights and of property and inheritance laws could help women — who accounted for the majority of farmers in some areas although they seldom owned land — to succeed in farming and help secure the world's food supply.

71. Women and girls were also instrumental to her Government's response to climate change, as reflected in the December 2009 announcement that the United States would work with other countries to mobilize US$ 100 billion annually by 2020 in order to address the climate needs of developing countries. Since women were taking leadership roles in advancing climate change solutions around the world, they should be given greater access to adaptation and mitigation technology, thus enabling them to promote and use "green" technologies in their families and communities.

72. Development could not thrive without the full participation of women, nor could peace be achieved unless they had an equal role in shaping it. Around the world, the places that were the most dangerous for women also posed the greatest threats to international peace and security. Where they were oppressed, governance was weak and extremism was more likely to take hold. Women must be active participants during the peace process and its aftermath. Not only did they have the right to participate in decisions that affected their lives but, in order for sustainable peace to take hold with a general improvement in everyone's lives, they must take an equal role in shaping those decisions. Her Government remained committed to working both bilaterally and multilaterally to accelerate implementation of Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security.

73. Her Government was also committed to elevating the status and treatment of issues related to women and girls in the United Nations system. In that regard, she hailed the considerable progress towards establishing a new, more powerful United Nations agency that would streamline the Organization's work on women and girls, ensure that those issues enjoyed their rightful status and help advance the MDGs.

74. **Mr. Fulgham** (United States of America), Executive Secretary, United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID), said that while his country's voice on the MDGs had only recently begun to be heard, its responsibility to lead was great. His Government fully supported the Goals and had seen their catalytic role in guiding and uniting the efforts of donors and partner countries.

75. Great credit was due to the citizens and governments of countries that had prioritized development and invested in their people. Since 1990, the number of people living on less than US$ 1.25 had fallen from 42 to 25 per cent of the world's population; per capita income had more than doubled in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania; and nearly two thirds of the developing countries had eliminated gender disparity in primary education. However, much remained to be done. Infant mortality was still unconscionably high, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; reduction of the maternal mortality and child under-nutrition rates was proceeding far too slowly; and gender inequality, which slowed achievement of the MDGs, was far from overcome. The majority of the world's poor were women and girls. They were unschooled, unhealthy, underfed and trapped in insecure, relatively low-paid positions. Investing in girls involved not only Goal 3 of the MDGs — elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education — but also reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition and creating opportunity.

76. Placing gender at the heart of development efforts was part of his Government's strategy for achieving the MDGs by 2015. First, innovative technologies and methods must be used and new ways of delivering existing solutions more quickly and cheaply to more people must be developed. That approach called for an operating model that encouraged all stakeholders to be "development entrepreneurs" by taking risks and making course corrections, learning as much from failures as from successes. Second, the focus must be

on encouraging broad-based economic growth, nurturing well-governed institutions, developing sustainable delivery systems, mitigating shocks and supporting trade; for example, his country's African Growth and Opportunity Act had been extended through 2015. Third, development outcomes must be tracked and evaluated not only by measuring dollars spent but by improving the quality of data used to assess progress, building indigenous evaluation capacity and fostering commitment to measuring results; his Government's foreign aid agency, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, had been highly successful in those areas. And, fourth, mutual accountability must be reinforced in principle and in practice by recognizing that both partner and donor countries had shared responsibilities. His Government was launching an aid transparency initiative in cooperation with United States agencies, other donors and partner governments and was creating a common reporting framework that would allow stakeholders to visualize foreign assistance investments by geographic area or sector and to track trends over time.

77. Those four imperatives — innovation, sustainability, outcomes and accountability — were illustrated by two of his Government's initiatives, which took a holistic approach to the MDGs through gender-inclusive development.

78. The Global Health Initiative focused on Goals 4, 5 and 6 (reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases). It would strengthen programmes that served women and girls in areas such as maternal health, family planning and nutrition and represented a significant investment — US$ 63 billion over six years — in helping more than 80 countries improve the health of their people. The Initiative included prenatal care, immunization, nutrition, water and sanitation, infectious disease control and family planning. It focused on women and girls, both for their own sake and because of their importance to the health of their families and communities, and had clear, ambitious and quantifiable outcomes such as saving 3 million children's lives, reducing the under-five mortality rate by more than a third and the maternal mortality rate by 30 per cent, doubling the number of babies born HIV-free and reducing the burden of malaria by half for 450 million people.

79. The Feed the Future initiative represented a US$ 3.5 billion, three-year commitment to strengthening the world's food supply that was expected to raise the income of at least 25 million people by 10 per cent per year over two decades. His Government was working with a range of partners and stakeholders that included the World Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in an effort to address the needs of small-scale farmers, many of them women, and agribusinesses by focusing on crops that enhanced women's standing, production and income and giving them access to financial services and to extension services delivered by a staff of women. The initiative reflected his Government's comparative advantage in research, innovation and entrepreneurship and its recognition of women's fundamental role in achieving food security; they produced 60 to 80 per cent of most countries' food, and equalizing their access to agricultural inputs could increase output by over 10 per cent. Moreover, studies had shown that increased income that was controlled by women was more likely to be spent on food and children's needs.

80. His Government understood that gender-inclusive development was the right way for donor agencies, developing countries, NGOs and the private sector to do business. It remained committed to helping countries achieve the MDGs by 2015 and to investing in and empowering women and girls in order to build a healthier, more food-secure, more just and more prosperous world.

81. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh), reviewer, said that while commending the United States initiatives described by the preceding speakers, he wished to highlight some problems and methodological concerns that arose in the context of social development programmes.

82. While a holistic approach could be useful in developing appropriate interventions, replication of a successful programme must be adapted to differences in social environments; what worked in one country would not necessarily work in another. Country ownership of programmes could harmonize the interests of donors and recipients if the programme met the donor's core imperatives while the details were left to the recipient's judgement. However, there might still be a mismatch between the "soft option" preferred by recipients and the "hard option" that was more responsive to donors' mandates. The tendency was for the recipient to focus on the issues that were easiest to address while postponing those that were more difficult, particularly in the case of programmes that

sought to change social attitudes and behaviour patterns; in such cases, pragmatism and balance were important for both donor and recipient.

83. By comparison with men, women generally spent a larger portion of their income on children and family. Evidence from microcredit showed that women were net savers in the rural economy and might thus be seen as good candidates for loans. However, because microfinance involved larger sums than microcredit, the risk was greater and the cooperation required for small-scale operations was replaced by competition within the business community; a successful entrepreneur was not simply one member of a group. Small and medium-sized enterprises suffered from inadequacies in the areas of credit, product development, market information and access. For women, those problems were compounded by the difficulty of obtaining credit; external financial assistance was needed, as was an appropriate methodology for risk appraisal. Loan guarantees — with a third party weighing the risk and paying the premium — and microinsurance — which was at a nascent stage and required attention from public institutions — provided an answer to that emerging risk by internalizing the cost of risk management and reducing moral hazard.

84. It had once been argued that increasing industrialization would draw more women into the labour market and that rural out-migration would keep wages constant without bringing about a labour shortage or output decline in the agricultural sector. In reality, however, the workforce had grown too quickly to keep pace with industrialization; urban slums had developed and increasing numbers of rural and urban dwellers, both men and women, were working in the informal sector at low wages even as wages in industry rose. New technologies were required in order to enhance productivity, but they were beyond the resources and managerial capacity of many women entrepreneurs. They were also labour-displacing and could cause short-term frictional unemployment, which should be addressed by granting ownership of the new technological assets to women.

85. A conscious effort to remove gender bias from apparently neutral policies was necessary. Bias in some areas, such as reproductive health care, could be addressed through programme structure and resource allocation alone while other areas, such as primary education, required specific procedures for access by girls. Better methodologies for assessing the gender impact and implications of public programmes were also needed. In developing countries, significant resources were devoted to maintaining infrastructures that were inadequate and in poor condition. Distribution of benefits was a function of asset distribution and social mores; women had inadequate access to such ownership and benefits.

86. The System of National Accounts 1993 did not provide gender-disaggregated statistics on income. Women's contribution to national income was often computed on the basis of the ratio of hours of unpaid family labour to household output (in, for example, crops). Allocation of labour by gender did not increase output, and the imputed wage was not adjusted for the increased supply of labour.

87. He welcomed the United States Government's announcement that it had increased funding for achievement of the MDGs. Its contribution represented a percentage of gross national income (GNI) 10 times greater than that of any other member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee and was expected to rise further.

88. Organizations of civil society tended to be city-centred and led by the urban elite, to be divided into many small entities with narrow agendas and to address the governing class rather than the common people and the vast rural population. They therefore created disparate and excessive demands on the political system that exacerbated disappointment with the political process in general and with political parties in particular. Those organizations needed to have democracy as their overarching goal. There was ambiguity regarding their primary function, which was to provide service under explicit or implicit contract with governments, financiers or advocates of selected issues; they had limited ability to select their own tasks and goals. A small number of large entities mediated between the external financiers and the many small field entities in a hierarchical system that resembled the relationship between client and patron.

89. Discourse on the topics of governance and democracy tended to focus excessively on techniques — such as auditing, reporting and parliamentary or public oversight — rather than on the values and institutions that gave practical meaning to the concepts of equity and accountability. Diplomatic and development efforts

were hindered by the current economic crisis and by rising domestic pressure to restrain deficits. More generally, diplomats and donors were prevented from participating directly in the value-generating democratic process. Aid, computed in real terms, must remain at the promised level if the MDGs were to be achieved, but it should be differentiated qualitatively in favour of the States that were strongly committed to democracy. However, it should be borne in mind that the efficacy of "soft diplomacy" had yet to be tested fully in a world of sovereign States.

90. **Mr. Staur** (Observer for Denmark), reviewer, commended the United States Government's policy change on the issues of gender equality and women's empowerment over the past 18 months.

91. Paragraph 3 of the Government's report (E/2010/58) stated: "A gender-inclusive approach to development is one that recognizes that women's issues affect everyone" and one of the presenters was the United States Ambassador for Global Women's Issues. However, his delegation was of the view that reducing gender equality to a "women's issue" could hinder progress towards true equality of the sexes; it was crucial to involve men and boys in that effort.

92. While he agreed that "[e]mpowering women economically can lift entire families and communities out of poverty" (para. 20 of the report), experience showed that such empowerment could not be achieved without ensuring women's equal participation in governance. He wondered whether the United States Government favoured the use of legislation or quotas in order to reach that goal.

93. Coordination and tracking of the many Government-supported gender equality programmes and interventions listed in the report must pose a significant challenge. He would like to know what percentage of United States official development assistance (ODA) was fully or partially committed to gender equality initiatives and how trends and progress in that area were measured.

94. Lastly, his own Government supported the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, and took a progressive approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. He noted President Obama's increased focus on and support for reproductive health and wondered whether there were areas or interventions that the United States Government could not support and why that Government found it so difficult to speak of sexual rights in general, and particularly those of women.

95. **Mr. Likwelile** (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), reviewer, expressed his delegation's appreciation for the support that the United States Government had extended to the people of Tanzania.

96. The interventions described in the report appeared to be driven by innovative ideas. He welcomed the statement in paragraph 3 that "[t]he condition of women in their societies is directly linked to a nation's level of development ...". Noting that the people of the United States came from diverse backgrounds, he asked how a society could find common ground in addressing the issues of gender and women's empowerment and whether the Government's experience made it possible to set global benchmarks for progress in national efforts, taking into account the differences in countries' initial conditions and support infrastructures.

97. The United States Government's overriding approach focused on increasing both economic and educational opportunities for women, and public awareness of the obstacles to progress. His own Government's policy on gender and women's empowerment emphasized awareness-raising and information-sharing through the media, promoted women's advancement to leadership positions and advocated for enhancing their voice in decision-making. It had made efforts to increase their knowledge of the law, enacted legislation aimed at protecting them from sexual abuse and female genital mutilation, and adopted health and education measures that included a pilot cash transfer project for women-headed households. The USAID Millennium Challenge Account-Tanzania gender policy provided overall guidance on mainstreaming gender issues into all projects.

98. Paragraph 7 of the report stated: "The United States considers that the Millennium Development Goals have played a catalytic role in guiding and uniting donors and partners towards realizing ... crucial goals". Experience showed that the success of development issues depended largely on whether they were linked to national strategies and policies and were accompanied by capacity-building and support for national systems and budget processes. He would welcome comments on how partnerships could be

strengthened in those areas through country-led and -owned development initiatives and what lessons could be learned from the United States experience; what instruments had proven most effective in attaining those goals and how progress was tracked; how assistance was targeted to the women most in need; and how effective United States country programmes had been.

99. **Mr. Sha** Zukang (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that despite their different national experiences, the three national voluntary presentations had demonstrated a firm commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women. In particular, the United States Government's renewed commitment to achievement of the MDGs would benefit both the Government and the United Nations. As the world's largest economy and opinion-maker, the United States could have a major impact on development through cooperation with the Organization.

100. **Ms. Verveer** (United States of America), Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues, said that Bangladesh was one of the world's leaders in the area of microfinance. It was necessary to focus on financial inclusion by, inter alia, making loan insurance available so that entrepreneurs need not risk losing all that they had. The larger sums involved in microfinance loans made them riskier, yet small and medium-sized enterprises were critical to economic growth because they provided more jobs. While knowledge and training could make women better credit risks, USAID and multilateral institutions should also provide loan guarantees.

101. On gender issue versus women's issues, she agreed that men must not be excluded. Her Government applied a "gender lens" in its Feed the Future initiative, which took into account the fact that men and women farmers might need different tools in order to increase their productivity. In her own work she focused on women in an effort to compensate for their marginalization, but she hoped that full mainstreaming of gender issues would one day make it unnecessary to do so.

102. Political empowerment was important if women were to influence outcomes, contribute their talents and perspectives and express their needs. In Afghanistan, her Government had supported the use of quotas for women's participation in Parliament, in local government and in the peace process and was helping them become more effective in leadership roles.

103. Her government was committed to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and recognized that women's health and well-being were important to their communities. One of the largest allocations of new resources under the Global Health Initiative was to family planning; the United States was also involved in United Nations initiatives under the Beijing Platform for Action.

104. **Mr. Fulgham** (United States of America), Executive Secretary, United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID), said he agreed that greater attention should be paid to microfinance; without training, however, women could not start their own businesses. Non-traditional funding sources such as private equity funds were an option to be explored, particularly in Africa. It was likely that traditional banks would continue to be reluctant to lend money to women but during the past 10 years, three microfinance banks had opened in the Middle East. In many of the countries in which USAID was active, significant portions of the population were under 25 years of age. Thus, the problems that those countries faced could not be solved by funds alone; true growth was needed.

105. While the United States integrated gender into all its programmes, it had not adequately tracked the impact of those initiatives during the past two years. The Obama administration was committed to increasing its accountability to taxpayers by better monitoring progress in the countries with which it worked and eliminating the "stovepiping" of data to high-level officials without proper review.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.